

DEVIL OR ANGEL? 'SAMMY' IS BACK TO SPARK WANDERERS

Wycombe Wanderers' 3, Hitchin Town 0

A SAINT to Enfield, Lucifer himself to Hitchin Town; but devil or angel, Wycombe's injury-plagued skipper, Keith Samuels, threw the two-team Isthmian League title race into confusion with a goal-a-half stir at Loakes Park on Saturday.

Recalled to first team service in place of Vince Faulkner at centre forward, he upended the championship aspirants from Top Field in vintage "Sammy" style.

Nevertheless a gun cannot fire by itself, and in an endless fly-past of crosses off Len Worley's right wing, Wanderers had the perfect trigger.

FULL-STRENGTH

When two full-strength sides meet, there can be no excuses, no ifs or buts. Indeed it detracts little from the prestige and desert of their victory that Wycombe's authority went unchallenged throughout.

The visitors' embarrassed by their unforeseen breakdown, sweated uncomfortably on the Loakes slopes, producing insipid football, more in keeping with the Hitchin of pre-Vin Burgess days.

It was the first time Town's defence had conceded three times in the same match this season; yet had, at least a prospective hat-trick not been hastily spurned by Les Merrick, the final deficit would have been appreciably larger.

As lively as ever before in 1968, Wycombe headed straight for "Charlie" Turner in the Hitchin goal only face-saving play from centre half John Ashworth holding them back.

In the fifth minute, Ashworth headed thankfully clear for a corner after a long tester from Horseman had found Worley who put over an inside cross meant for Samuels.

Former Stevenage half back, Peter Robinson, went off for treatment after a collision with Merrick on Town's line in the seventh minute. He returned four minutes later, having just seen his sparring partner miss the first of many chances.

SMOTHERED

As John Brookes intelligently smothered any threat from the

outside left, Wycombe were left dependent almost solely upon the Worley path to goal. Yet, this—with Hitchin in no mood for the subtleties—was enough. Ian Reid, set the unenviable task of blockading him, needed all his International experience and more, and still failed to shackle the tireless number seven.

However, Horseman sparked off the first goal, hoisting play into the Hitchin area. Robinson cleared Merrick's dropping header off the line to start a confused scramble, in which Samuels found an open space and loosed a shot after 17 minutes, despite Hawkins' desperate challenge.

Soon after, Turner employed lightning anticipation to grab a Horseman probe from ten yards, and, with the Hitchin defence painfully lax, Wanderers sought to consolidate.

On a break from routine, Worley switched to the left, and supplied the inevitable inside pass for Samuels to collect off a defender's foot. But the attack fell through as Horseman headed high.

Merrick crashed the ball wide a minute before the interval, and Wycombe did not penetrate again, until the 52nd minute, when a Worley free kick hovered to the far post to be passed on for Samuels to head home.

FACE TO FACE

Samuels came face to face with a hat-trick and quickly bypassed it again two minutes later, launching the ball into orbit when the goal stood at his mercy.

But, Hitchin, reduced to scare kick-and-rush attempts at attack, while their mid-field linkmen could rarely be identified somewhere in a crowd of blue shirts, were already accepting the facts of life.

They breathed successive sighs as Turner turned a Merrick drive round the post; Worley almost uprooted the Hitchin woodwork by pounding the underside of the bar; and Turner again pushed the ball clear under pressure from Horseman and Worley.

In the 70th minute, Samuels lined up and banged in a third, with the entire action taking place from an offside position. But, Worley, scythed through five minutes later leaving his shadow in the rear before transferring possession across goal for the unmarked Horseman to finish off from point blank range.

A minute later, Hitchin decided not to risk Robinson's suspect leg any further, replacing him with Norman Church.

Wycombe, however, had still more left to offer. Horseman delivered the shot of the match, only for Turner to answer the challenge and bring off a save of similar status, drawing loud applause from the crowd.

Fittingly enough, Worley made the final gesture of the afternoon stabbing the ball straight into the waiting arms of Turner in the final sixty seconds.

Such forceful play in all departments of the field visibly did Wanderers a power of good, and it must surely be their task in the next month to reproduce its like; nothing less will do if 'gates' are to be maintained now that all major honours have eluded them this season.

The old firm of Worley, Samuels and Horseman commanded the spotlight on Saturday. But, although Barry Baker and Dave Thomas kept a constant flow coming from midfield

—a feat which looked well beyond Hitchin's mid-line on the day—there can be no doubt that Wycombe relied to a large extent on that one approach; when it might be healthier to nurture a second route to protect against the collapse of such an important part of their game.

Wycombe: Maskell; Temel, Gale; Lailey, Rundle; Thomas; Worley, Baker, Samuels, Horseman, Merrick.

Hitchin: Turnor; Brookes, Reid; Hawkins, Ashworth, Robinson; Gladwin, Cutler, Gogan, Harley, Prall. Sub.: Church (for Robinson).